

## Conceptology of the Imaginal World (Alam-e Mithal) and the Faculty of Imagination in Masnavi

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Received: 14/02/2024

Accepted: 01/10/2025

### Introduction

Imagination and its related discussions are among the most pivotal subjects in the fields of mystical epistemology, ontology, and anthropology, acting as a bridge between the sensible and intelligible realms. Among Islamic thinkers, Mawlana Jalaluddin Balkhi pays special attention to this concept in his "Masnavi", utilizing the tools of imagination and the Imaginal World to explain occult truths, revelation, dreams, and eschatology. Despite numerous studies on imagination, a comprehensive and independent analysis that simultaneously examines Rumi's view on the "Faculty of Imagination" (as a perceptual tool) and the "Imaginal World" (as a level of existence), comparing it with the ideas of major philosophers and mystics, is rarely conducted.

The main issue of this research is to clarify the nature and quality of imagination in Rumi's thought and to determine the ontological status of the Imaginal World within his intellectual framework. This study aims to demonstrate, through the analysis of verses and parables in the *Masnavi*, how Rumi moved beyond Peripatetic views, which denied the independent existence of the Imaginal World, to embrace the Illuminationist and mystical perspectives.

### Methodology

This research was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method, relying on library resources. The statistical population is the full text of the *Masnavi*, from which concepts related to imagination, illusion (Wahm), the Imaginal World, and imaginal forms (Suwar-e Barzakhi) were extracted and categorized. These data were then compared and analyzed against the theoretical foundations of philosophers such as Al-Farabi, Avicenna, Suhrawardi, and Mulla Sadra, as well as mystics like Ibn Arabi, to highlight the convergences and divergences of Rumi's thought with these thinkers.

## Findings

The findings indicate that Rumi employs "Imagination" (Khíyal) in three general senses: 1) A faculty of the soul; 2) An intermediate world between the physical dominion (Mulk) and the spiritual dominion (Malakut); and 3) The entirety of existence and everything other than God (Ma-siwa-Allah).

### A) The Faculty of Imagination as a Perceptual Tool:

Rumi depicts imagination in the *Masnavi* as a double-edged sword. On one hand, if imagination is under the domination of desire and passion, it becomes a tool of Satan and leads to human downfall. Stories like "The Lion and the Hare" illustrate how fantasy and illusion can invert reality and cause destruction. On the other hand, if guided by intellect and the light of faith, imagination becomes a ladder for ascending to the world of meaning and a means of perceiving non-sensible truths. Rumi believes that the imaginal forms of each person are shaped according to their inner spiritual capacity and concerns.

### B) The Imaginal World (Disconnected Imagination):

Contrary to Peripatetic philosophers like Avicenna, who denied the immateriality of the faculty of imagination and the existence of the Imaginal World, findings show that Rumi, following the Illuminationist sages and Ibn Arabi, affirms the existence of an independent world called the "Imaginal World" or "Disconnected Imagination" (Khayal-e Monfasel). In Rumi's cosmology, the hierarchy of existence includes the World of Unity, the World of Non-Existence (Fixed Entities), the World of Imagination, the World of Existence, and the World of Sense. Notably, Rumi considers the Imaginal World to be vaster and subtler than the material world (sense and color) and believes the material world is a shadow of that superior realm.

### C) Functions of the Imaginal World in Explaining Eschatology:

One of the key findings is the explanation of the "Imaginal Body" in Rumi's thought. In stories such as "Uzair" and the resurrection of the dead, he refers to resurrection with an imaginal body. Rumi believes that souls after death, and even the saints of God in this world (like the story of Daquqi), perceive truths with a body that lacks material mass but possesses quantity and shape (the Hurqalyan body).

## Discussion and Conclusion

Analysis of the evidence in the *Masnavi* indicates that Rumi presents an artistic synthesis of philosophy and mysticism regarding imagination. Like Ibn Arabi, he differentiates between "Connected Imagination" (subjective and internal) and "Disconnected Imagination" (objective and external).

The final conclusion of the research suggests that:

1. Immateriality of Imagination: Contrary to Al-Farabi, who did not attribute complete immateriality to imagination, Rumi believes in the "Barzakhi" immateriality of the Imaginal World and the faculty of imagination, holding them to be free from the bonds of matter.

2. Imagination of the Elite vs. Commoners: Rumi draws a precise boundary between the "Imagination of the Commoners" (which causes misguidance and dispersion) and the "Imagination of the Elite" (which is the snare of saints and the beloveds of God's garden). The imagination of the elite is the very intuition of truths in imaginal forms.

3. Ontological Mediation: The Imaginal World in Rumi's thought is the missing link between the material world and the world of spirits. Without this realm, the explanation of revelation, the spiritual ascension (Mi'raj), the embodiment of deeds, and veridical dreams in the *Masnavi*'s intellectual system would be impossible.

Therefore, Rumi moves beyond a merely psychological view of imagination, granting it an ontological status and introducing it as a necessary passage for spiritual wayfarers to move from the multiplicity of the sensory world to the unity of Divine reality.

**Keywords:** Masnavi Manavi, Rumi, Faculty of Imagination, Imaginal World, Ontology, Islamic Mysticism.